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FROM THE U.S. MISSION TO THE UN AGENCIES IN ROME

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA: FAO DISCUSSIONS ON INCIDENT
MANAGEMENT TEAMS AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

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1. Summary: In discussions over the past week, FAO Senior Veterinary Officer Juan Lubroth and Senior Operations Officer Cristina Amaral updated us on FAO activities to combat Avian Influenza (AI). FAO senior management is acting to remove management constraints by: a) instituting a special waiver to expedite the recruitment of international staff to work on AI activities worldwide, and b) elevating the status of the Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Disease Operations (ECTAD) to work as an operational management center. Our discussions also garnered FAO receptiveness to USG plans to establish incident management teams (IMTs). This is an action message. See paras 4 and 12. End Summary.

Institutional Constraints Resolved

2. Responding to earlier concerns that FAO management reforms were limiting the availability of badly needed human resources within FAO's Animal Production and Health Division (AGA), Juan Lubroth, FAO Senior Veterinary Officer/Infectious Diseases, and Cristina Amaral, FAO Senior Operations Officer, Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division (TCE), told us on February 28 that Director-General Diouf has issued an internal note eliminating potential institutional constraints. The note establishes a special status for an Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Disease Operations (ECTAD) that will also serve as an internal operations management center, and institutes a waiver for the expedited recruitment of AI technical staff and consultants, particularly retirees. We have also learned that FAO is currently recruiting for seven regional positions and five country positions under this mechanism.

3. The seven regional positions will include three persons who will form part of FAO's HQ-based rapid response team to be deployed to the field as outbreaks occur. The remaining regional positions will be placed in Bamako at a decentralized regional ECTAD office to cover West Africa, and in Cairo, Nairobi, and Dhaka. [Note: Amaral reported that, due to heightened concerns, a consultant will travel soon to Bangladesh to work on a plan of action with the government for a few weeks. End Note] Of the five country positions, the recruitment process for which is nearly complete, one will be a central coordinator located at HQ while the others will be posted to each of the four endemic countries of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Indonesia. We will provide more information, but believe that previously reported management constraints will not impede the FAO from carrying out its duties to control AI.

4. Action Request: USMISSION UN ROME suggests that talking points for Cabinet-level calls to Secretary General Annan and Director General Diouf should include the positive message that the removal of any management constraints that allows FAO the flexibility to mobilize and use resources, especially personnel resources, is welcome.

Emergency Management/Incident Management Teams

15. Lubroth also noted he had previously discussed with Peter Fernandez, APHIS/Brussels, the requirements and logistics for making a USDA person available to FAO for coordination of emergency activities, particularly the development of Incident Management Teams (IMT). One possibility discussed would be to post the person to USMISSION UN ROME with the understanding that he/she would be physically working at FAO and reporting to Lubroth. Lubroth has already forwarded to Fernandez a copy of the FAO personal history form used to classify international experience, languages and activity-coordination background of possible candidates. FAO has been urging the United States and other countries to make experts available at headquarters and in the field. FAO would ideally like to have an American to organize the IMTs in Rome. Lubroth emphasized that the problem at this point is not money, but bodies.

16. FAO is generally receptive to the concept of IMTs. Lubroth sees the IMTs as virtual teams composed of 2-5 members with experience in virology, epidemiology and communications, depending on the circumstances, who are ready for deployment within 24 hours with an emergency kit and passport in hand. Teams could be used for both initial assessments and emergency response coordination. Logistical support, including transportation, visas, coordination with local governments, etc., would be handled by FAO, as would field debriefings with FAO Regional Representatives and OIE delegations where appropriate. If FAO were to be the lead on the IMTs, there would be an understanding among all players that the IMTs form part of an international mission led by FAO/OIE. Lastly, during times of relative calm, Lubroth could see FAO deploying these teams to countries to assess other diseases such as Nipah virus and Rift Valley fever.

18. Lubroth stressed that, for international evaluations, the IMTs would need to use an improved version of the OIE assessment tool. In his view, the OIE tool, which is currently being used by national veterinary services worldwide, is appropriate for auto-evaluations, but is not sufficient for international evaluations. FAO has done some in-depth work on behalf of the World Bank to improve veterinary assessments internationally and plans to marry the national OIE model with its efforts in this field.

19. Lubroth also floated a complementary concept to emulate the WHO Global Outbreak Alert Response Network (GOARN), of which FAO is a member. GOARN is a network of institutions, such as universities or NGOs, which are called upon to field 3-4 experts during a public health outbreak or emergency. Lubroth believes it would be useful to establish a GOARN-like structure specifically for trans-boundary animal diseases.

International Experts

110. During a February 16 meeting with David Nabarro, UN Special Coordinator for AI, AGA stated that one of their immediate needs is to establish a roster of 20 veterinarians for worldwide deployment to teach culling and environmentally safe disposal techniques. FAO currently has a database of 171 animal disease experts, almost all veterinarians; of these, 27 are personally known to Lubroth to be highly competent and have been slated as possible team leaders. Officials from the Netherlands have also had discussions with FAO about establishing emergency response teams and have offered to train 30 specialists available and on call at FAO's disposal; these 30 experts will be added to FAO's database. Presently, a Dutch veterinarian on loan to FAO for six months is working to develop this international roster.

111. Next steps in putting a global emergency response capability in place with FAO coordination: FAO is willing to organize a small meeting the week of March 6 to develop a concrete proposal for the emergency response mechanism(s). This would probably be followed by a larger meeting with major donors to take whatever decisions are necessary to implement the framework. Outside participants for the initial meeting will probably comprise of APHIS representatives, including Administrator Ron DeHaven, as well as representatives from the Netherlands veterinary service and the European Commission.

112. Action request: USMISSION UN ROME would like a USDA/Washington go-ahead to work with FAO to set up a planning meeting the week of March 6 to be followed by a larger emergency coordination meeting at a date TBD. We recognize Dr. DeHaven is charged with developing an FAO strategy paper and would expect these meetings to be fully consistent with that strategy.

Other Updates

¶13. Following is a synopsis of related issues also mentioned by Lubroth:

-- During the February 16 meeting with Nabarro, he asked that FAO send to him all documents, reports and research it produces as well as rumors it is tracking on possible outbreaks as these come out because all FAO predictions have been accurate to date.

-- Egypt, which has the highest concentration of veterinarians per capita in the world, would be interested in collaborating on joint projects with the U.S. and the Netherlands. The Egyptian experts' Arabic language skills would be useful.

-- The World Bank is pushing FAO to do an AI assessment on Ethiopia. FAO sees a more immediate need in Syria.

-- Although Bangladesh has strong veterinary services, it and Myanmar are at high risk for current outbreaks.

¶14. USMISSION UN ROME will continue to cover and widely disseminate information on FAO activities to combat and control Avian Influenza.

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